U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
PALM SPRINGS-SOUTH COAST FIELD OFFICE

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
EA Number CA-660-05-28

DATE:	February 18, 2005
TITLE / PROJECT TYPE:	OHV Route Restoration, Northern Kickapoo Trail
CASE FILE / PROJECT NO:	N/A
FUNDING CODE: 1772	**PROGRAM ELEMENT:** JA
BLM OFFICE:	Palm Springs- South Coast Field Office 690 W. Garnet Avenue, P.O. Box 581260 North Palm Springs, CA 92258-1260
APPLICANT / PROPONENT:	BLM
LOCATION OF PROPOSED ACTION:	Little Morongo Canyon, Kickapoo Trail Big Morongo Canyon Area of Critical Environmental Concern San Bernardino County (SBBM) Township 1S, Range 4E: Sections 25 and 36 Township 1S, Range 5E: Sections 20, 21 and 30
PROJECT ACREAGE:	1.5 acres direct impact, 21 acres diffuse impacts (all BLM land)
USGS TOPOGRAPHIC MAP:	Morongo Valley and Yucca Valley South

LAND USE PLAN CONFORMANCE and Other Regulatory Compliance:

In accordance with Title 43 Code of Federal Regulations 1610.5-3, the proposed action and alternatives are in conformance with the following approved land use plan: **California Desert Conservation Area Plan, 1980; Coachella Valley CDCA Plan Amendment, 2002.**

The USFWS was consulted informally during this process for Environmental Assessment CA-660-02-36, in regards to previous work in the same project area. A determination of beneficial affect was made by the BLM and the USFWS. Formal consultation was not required.

NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

This Environmental Assessment details a continuation of the restoration work previously approved under EA CA-660-05-03. The only designated route through Little Morongo Canyon is the Southern California Edison (SCE) access road/Kickapoo Trail (see CDCA Plan Amendment), however numerous unauthorized trails create a braided network through the canyon which creates a much larger area of impact then the access road alone, and some allow travel into side canyons as well. These unauthorized trails are the sites for the proposed rehabilitation efforts in order to minimize soil erosion and loss of native vegetation. Rehabilitating non-designated routes encourages OHV's to stay on the BLM-designated route within Little Morongo Canyon. Increased OHV compliance together with increased plant cover and diversity of shrubs, forbs, and grasses is expected to improve wildlife habitat, increase wildlife populations, and restore ecosystem processes.

A timely response by BLM for soil protection and vegetation restoration in the ACEC will afford greater protection to species of special concern to BLM managers, to outstanding scenic landscapes, and to recreation uses, thereby meeting public expectations for environmental protection while advancing opportunities for high-quality, safety-conscious OHV recreation.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION and ALTERNATIVES

Background

The proposed rehabilitation sites include numerous side trails that braid in and out of the Southern California Edison (SCE) access road that runs from the Devers substation near Desert Hot Springs through lower Little Morongo Canyon and the upper unnamed canyon that connects with the Kickapoo Trail in Yucca Valley. This road is a popular touring road for off-highway vehicle enthusiasts as it is one of the few routes between the Morongo Basin and the Coachella Valley. The route is passable to 4-wheel drive vehicles all year and most 2-wheel vehicles during the dry season. The southern half of the road (contained in T1S R4E Section 36 and Sections to the south) has already been restored, as described in EA 660-05-03. This EA describes work proposed for the northern half of the road. The point where the Kickapoo trail diverges from the bottom of Little Morongo Canyon is on an inholding of private land. An unauthorized route (dubbed 'off CV005') travels from this point up Little Morongo Canyon to the Morongo Lakes area. Several other unauthorized routes which enter BLM land from this unauthorized route would also be restored. The first half-mile of 'off CV005' is on private land, the remainder is on public land. In FY 2004, large earthen berms were created in 'off CV005' near the point it enters public land, but the berms have not effectively blocked OHV access, and they have altered the natural flow of water in the canyon, causing pools to form, disturbing the distribution of sediment, and focusing the flow of water through breaks in the berm, causing high banks to form in the wash (see **Figures 1 and 2**). Furthermore, some of the berms have been washed out by water flow. Overall, they are not an effective barrier to vehicle travel in Little Morongo Canyon.

Figure 1. A pool of water caused by a large earthen berm after rain in Little Morongo Canyon. OHV are able to enter the canyon on the far right side of the berm.

Figure 2 The far right side of the berm pictured in Figure 1, after the built-up water broke through the berm. Notice the steep banks caused by this channelization of the water flow.

1. Proposed Action

The Bureau of Land Management proposes to restore the numerous unauthorized side trails that stem from a 6,000 meter (4 mile) section of the Kickapoo Trail (CV 005), using the Student Conservation Association (SCA) as contractors for the restoration work. SCA would also restore four unauthorized routes that enter BLM land from an unauthorized route on private land in Little Morongo Canyon ('off CV005'), near the point where the Kickapoo Trail splits from Little Morongo Canyon (T1S R5E Section 31).

At the point that the unauthorized route 'off CV005' enters public land, or at the nearest point where the canyon is narrowest, natural rock barriers would be placed in the route using mechanized equipment, as a replacement for the ineffective earthen berms. The canyon floor contains some large boulders which would be available for this purpose. Boulders would only be used if they could be acquired and put in place without using mechanized equipment on the stable, vegetated terraces adjacent to the wash. If additional rock material is needed, it would be properly acquired and brought to the site. Other barriers such as posts or fences may be installed, if necessary, to block OHV access, especially on the stable terraces. 'Route closed' carsonite signs would also be installed. BLM would flatten the large earthen berms with mechanized equipment in order to restore the natural appearance and ecosystem functioning of the wash, but this work would be delayed until there is no standing or flowing above-ground water in the wash to reduce water-quality impacts. Finally, the unauthorized route 'off CV005' would be restored behind the rock barriers.

In summary, approximately 3100 meters of unauthorized routes would be restored, with an average width of 2 meters, for a total of 6200 square meters (1.5 acres). A brief description of all restoration sites may be found in **Table 1**. Below is a summary of the restoration techniques which may be employed for the project. The SCA restoration technicians will decide which treatments to employ at each site unless given specific instructions by the ECO restoration ecologist. In almost all instances only hand tools will be used. Overall, the restoration aims to restore the soil and topography to a more natural state which will enhance natural regeneration of vegetation.

Restoration Techniques:

Decompaction

Non-designated trails with repeated vehicle traffic may require soil decompaction to increase water infiltration. Improving water infiltration allows plants to establish and burrowing animals such as ants, rodents, and foxes, to inhabit the soil again. Workers shall use hand tools such as soil spades, spading forks, and shovels to loosen the top two to six inches of soil.

Soil Pitting

Soil pitting contours the soil to direct water flow and draw wind-blown seeds to focal spots on the ground. Pitting first creates bowls approximately one to two feet wide and six inches deep. This practice creates microsites in the bowls to increase seed germination and small plant growth.

Soil Imprinting

Soil imprinting entails raking small trenches to roughen the texture on surface soil and to collect wind-blown seed. Hand tools such as shovels and rakes shall be used.

Raking

On non-designated trails formed after a single trespass (one person at one time) or trails with little or no vegetation trampling or soil compaction after trespass, work crews shall rake or sweep with a broom the top one inch of soil to hide these evidence of tracks. Soils may also be contoured to match surrounding

land. Only hand tools shall be used.

Barricading with Rice Straw Bales
Certified weed-free bales of rice straw shall obstruct OHV travel on closed areas formerly used for non-designated hill climbs and on non-designated OHV trails. The bales slow and diffuse soil erosion and water flow down slopes. Over time, rice straw bales break down and provide mulch for plants grown from seeds trapped on the upslope side of the decomposing bale. A truck to transport bales is the only mechanical equipment required.

Terracing with Berms
Berms or terraces slow and disperse water flow. People shall use hand tools to disturb the top one to six inches of soil.

Vertical Mulching
Dead plant material placed at the beginning of non-designated trails off of BLM-designated trails can disguise these trails and deter additional illicit OHV traffic. Large desert shrubs on the soil surface act as barricades. Similarly, dead shrubs or branches planted upright in the soil make the trail blend in with surrounding vegetation. Vertical mulch also benefits restoration by trapping wind-blown seeds and lessening wind erosion just above the ground surface. This work shall be primarily accomplished with hand tools. Little soil disturbance would be needed except where mulch is "planted" and thus requires a small hole to anchor the material.

Large Rocks and Fencing
Barricades may consist of a row of large rocks and boulders to deter use in areas where fencing is inappropriate or ineffective. Placement of large rocks requires some equipment and a small amount of soil disturbance is associated with their use. If the rocks are acquired on site, there may be additional soil disturbance, which restoration crews would keep at a minimum level and ensure that no cultural or biological resources are impacted. Fencing would entail soil disturbance, but no areas have been identified thus far where fencing is necessary.

Planting Vegetation
Re-vegetating involves directly planting native species to the line of sight from a BLM-designated OHV trail to accelerate improvements to soil stability, vegetation cover and diversity, and wildlife habitat. Eventually re-vegetation disguises trails. Planting shall make use of hand tools (shovels) and some mechanized equipment (augers) to dig holes up to two feet deep and one foot wide, for the largest transplants. In extraordinary cases, transplantation of larger plants would require somewhat larger holes potentially up to three feet deep and three feet wide. During FY 2005, available stock of that size will not be available. After planting, work can contour soil to direct the flow of rainwater or irrigation water to plant roots.

Planting vegetation requires considerable advance work. First, the restoration ecologists shall gather local provenances of seeds for native shrub, forb, and grass species. In dry years, it may be necessary to irrigate specimens of plant species desired for propagation by seed. To propagate plants from seed and to hold young plants before outplanting, the restoration ecologists shall form a contract with Joshua Tree National Park Nursery or construct portable lath houses.

Seeding
Seeding requires rakes to collect seed from seed banks in the soil or from dried seedpods still attached on plants. Hand sowing spread seeds across the soil surface. Raking shall disturb at most the top one-inch

of soil. Hand seeding also may be concurrent with soil pitting (see above) to improve seed germination rates.

Signing
Insufficient or ambiguous signs on BLM-designated routes cause responsible OHV riders to accidentally ride on non-designated routes. To help riders, the restoration ecology team shall work closely with the ECO trail maintenance team to maintain existing signs and place new signs wherever necessary. Various signs may be appropriate to site needs; and recreational, directional, special designation, or informational signs may be needed. Special designation signing shall also indicate areas of re-vegetation to prevent unintended trampling. Signing work involves a carsonite sign driver that can disturb soil to a one-foot depth but with a minimal surface width disturbance.

Removing Manufactured Materials
The restoration team shall remove litter and other unsightly or potentially dangerous manufactured materials less than 50 years old. If the restoration team discovers previously undocumented materials that appear to be more than fifty years old, they shall consult with the cultural resources specialist at the Palm Springs FO. The cultural resources specialist will assess whether removing materials older than 50 years is appropriate and what documentation or mitigation is appropriate. Removal shall include materials of non-historical value such as abandoned automobiles. Removal of large objects may involve the hiring of a separate contractor such as a Tow-Truck company. Disturbances related to removal will be kept at a minimum, and if removal would pose a threat to a species of concern, no removal will occur.

Eradicating Noxious Weeds
The restoration crew shall remove noxious non-native plants and perennial shrubs growing in non-designated routes and trails by hand or with hand tools. If the infestation of noxious weeds appears to require applications of herbicides (as with *Tamarix* sp), the restoration ecologists shall consult with the BLM Palm Springs FO natural resource specialist coordinating the noxious weed program at the FO to arrange for herbicide treatments by an integrated pest management person licensed by the State of California. In the case of *Tamarix* sp., chainsaws may be used by certified personnel under the supervision of a natural resource specialist.

Maintaining Site Integrity
People remove barriers and trample plantings on occasion. To minimize costly irreversible damage, rehabilitated sites require maintenance as they are undergoing natural restoration. The restoration ecologists may undertake additional restoration efforts and barriers on a case-by-case basis.

Summary of work: Work will be done between February 15th 2005 and May 11th 2005 or until all sites are restored. Work will be conducted between the hours of 0700 and 2000. Summary information on the unauthorized routes to be restored can be found in **Table 1**, and **Figure 3** is a map of the area to be restored.

Table 1. UTM location, site number, azimuth, trail type, and length to the line-of-sight of the unauthorized routes to be restored under the proposed action. NAD 1983 datum used for UTMS.

Site Identifier		UTME	UTM N	Trail Type	Line of sight
(route number)	*(incursion number)*	*(NAD 83)*	*(NAD 83)*		*(m)*
off CV005	1	545102	3766761	hill climb	59
off CV005	2	545105	3767317	cross country	54
off CV005	3	545101	3767322	cross country	29
off CV005	4	545089	3767419	parallel wash	78
CV005	48	545879	3767580	parallel wash	67
CV005	49	545885	3767771	parallel wash	78
CV005	50	545894	3767867	parallel wash	64
CV005	51	545989	3768168	parallel wash	91
CV005	52	545984	3768178	parallel wash	45
CV005	53	546088	3768421	parallel wash	50
CV005	54	546467	3768605	cross country	30
CV005	55	546467	3768605	hill climb	225
CV005	56	546470	3768627	cross country	21
CV005	57	546501	3768743	cross country	44
CV005	58	546508	3768767	cross country	32
CV005	59	546516	3768792	parallel	227
CV005	60	546565	3768983	cross country	10
CV005	61	546609	3769137	parallel	59
CV005	62	546884	3769363	parallel wash	51
CV005	63	546994	3769426	parallel wash	89
CV005	64	546998	3769431	parallel wash	51
CV005	65	547035	3769547	parallel wash	33
CV005	66	547039	3769572	parallel wash	62
CV005	67	547118	3769640	parallel wash	41
CV005	68	547042	3769607	cross country	33
CV005	69	547139	3769644	cross country	30
CV005	70	547215	3769660	cross country	12
CV005	71	547282	3769668	parallel	113
CV005	72	547558	3769843	hill climb	145
CV005	73	547546	3769834	cross country	36
CV005	74	547538	3769768	cross country	20
CV005	75	547546	3769770	cross country	19
CV005	76	547872	3769898	cross country	50
CV005	77	548261	3770351	parallel wash	66
CV005	78	548451	3770406	parallel wash	28
CV005	79	548602	3770517	hill climb	48

Table 1 (continued)

Site Identifier (route number)	Site Identifier (incursion number)	UTME (NAD 83)	UTM N (NAD 83)	Trail Type	Line of sight (m)
CV005	80	548610	3770515	cross country to hill climb	19
CV005	81	548782	3770543	hill climb	43
CV005	82	548782	3770543	cross country	64
CV005	83	548774	3770625	hill climb	93
CV005	84	548908	3770611	parallel wash	65
CV005	85	549237	3770656	parallel wash	56
CV005	86	549244	3770659	parallel wash	52
CV005	87	549334	3770659	parallel wash	46
CV005	88	549334	3770659	parallel wash	69
CV005	89	549506	3770655	parallel wash	58
CV005	90	549547	3770639	parallel wash	40
CV005	91	549664	3770563	parallel wash	98
CV005	92	549772	3770583	cross country	40
CV005	93	549750	3770562	cross country	38
CV005	94	549756	3770564	hill climb	100

{ SHAPE * MERGEFORMAT **}**
Figure 3. Locations of restoration sites along the Kickapoo Trail.

2. No Action Alternative

The Proposed Action would not be undertaken. Existing management and use of the site would continue subject to applicable statutes, regulations, policy and land use plans. Any revegetation will occur naturally.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

1. Area Description

Restoration activities would take place in creosote (Larrea tridentata-Ambrosia dumosa) scrub and microphyll woodland vegetation communities. A further description of the affected environment can be found in the California Desert Conservation Area Plan EIS (1980, with amendments 1982-2002) and is incorporated by reference. The lands included in the Big Morongo Canyon ACEC contain several significant resources that contribute to the area's relevance and importance.

Wildlife

Sensitive Wildlife Species. The wildlife species of special management concern shown in Table 2 may potentially be found within the portions of the Big Morongo Canyon ACEC to be rehabilitated under this action.

Table 2: Wildlife Species of Special Management Concern

SPECIES	STATUS
Desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii)*	Federal/State Threatened

Desert bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis nelsoni*)	State Protected
Peninsular bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis nelsoni dps*)	Federal Endangered/State Threatened
Mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*)	Game Animal
Gambel's quail (*Lophortyx gambelii*)	Game Bird
Burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*)	State Species of Concern
Least bell's vireo (*Vireo bellii pusilus*)	Federal/State Endangered
Cooper's hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*)	State Species of Concern
Le Conte's thrasher (*Toxostoma lecontei*)	State Species of Concern

Reptiles. The desert tortoise is a Federal- and California-threatened species that is found in the arid sandy or gravelly locales of the Mojave Desert. The more sandy flat areas in the bottoms of the two canyons and the hillsides where habitat rehabilitation is proposed provide potential desert tortoise habitat. The pre-restoration survey found only one tortoise burrow, and a large tortoise was visible within this burrow. Restoration of the site containing this burrow will be monitored per Appendix 1: Desert Tortoise Mitigation.

Mammals. Desert bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis ssp. nelsoni*) are found in the upper portions of the two canyons to be restored owing to the presence of permanent water sources in Little Morongo Canyon (beyond specific restoration sites). These two canyons serve as a major corridor for the Little San Bernardino Mountain herd, estimated to be approximately 50 sheep, as it moves between the Little Morongo Canyon water sources and suitable habitat in Joshua Tree National Park to the east.

Other mammals that can be found in the two canyons where habitat rehabilitation is proposed are mountain lion (*Felis concolor*), mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), bobcat (*Lynx rufus*), raccoon (*Procyon lotor*), ring-tailed cat (*Bassaricus astutus*), coyote (*Canus latrans*), and other small mammal species.

Birds. Though bird diversity is a trademark of the Big Morongo Canyon "—›—, most bird life is seen in the permanent riparian habitats at the northern end of Big Morongo Canyon near the town of Morongo Valley. Within the limits of the two canyons where habitat rehabilitation is proposed, there exists potential habitat for those avian species of special management concern shown in Table 2. However, no sign or sightings of these species were found during pre-restoration surveys, and due to the already disturbed nature (soil compaction, minimal vegetation cover) of the sites to be restored, no impact on these species is anticipated.

Sensitive Plant Species

Several plant species that are federally or state endangered or threatened or are identified as sensitive by the California Native Plants Society (CNPS) could potentially be found within the portions of the Big Morongo Canyon ACEC (i.e., appropriate elevation/habitat) to be rehabilitated under this action. Table 3 shows these species. No sightings of these species have ever been recorded at the rehabilitation site locales and none of these species were found during pre-restoration surveys.

Table 3: Sensitive Plant Species

SPECIES	STATUS
Chaparral sand-verbena (*Abronia villosa var. aurita*)	CNPS 1B
Pinyon rock cress (*Arabis dispar*)	CNPS 2

Parish's rock cress (*Arabis parishii*)	CNPS 1B
Darwin rock cress (*Arabis pulchra var. munciensis*)	CNPS 2
Shockley's rock cress (*Arabis shockleyi*)	CNPS 2
Triple-ribbed milk-vetch (*Astragalus tricarinatus*)	Federal endangered, CNPS 1B
Palmer's mariposa lily (*Calochortus palmeri var. palmeri*)	CNPS 1B
Parry's spineflower (*Chorizanthe parryi var. parryi*)	CNPS 3
White-bracted spineflower (*Chorizanthe xanti var. leucotheca*)	CNPS 1B
Parish's daisy (*Erigeron parishii*)	Federal threatened, CNPS 1B
Little San Bernardino Mtns. linanthus (*Linanthus maculatus*)	CNPS 1B
Orcutt's linanthus (*Linanthus orcuttii*)	CNPS 1B
Robison's monardella (*Monardella robisonii*)	CNPS 1B

Cultural Resources

Little Morongo Canyon would have served, and still does, as a travel route between the Coachella and Morongo Valleys. Members of the Serrano Tribe occupied Big and Little Morongo Canyons during the ethnographic period. The Serrano followed a life way similar to their southern neighbors, the Cahuilla. Evidence exists that economic, ceremonial and social relationships existed between the Serrano and the Cahuilla. Both groups occupied villages situated to take advantage of ecotones and water supplies so that the majority of necessary plant and animal foods and materials were available within a short distance.

The nearest recorded prehistoric site is SBr-148 which is located approximately 2 miles northwest of the project area. SBr-148 (also apparently referenced as Sbr-349) is a site containing midden soils, features, and artifacts that suggest either long-term or repeated occupation. Thomas King reported in a 1971 inventory report that the site was a "quite large midden site" with a suggested temporal range from 2000 BP through the historic period. The site has been heavily looted and vandalized.

The project area has the potential to contain resources associated with travel between the Coachella and Morongo Valleys. However, no evidence of trails, cairns, or historic roads was noted. Neither was there any evidence of seasonal use or plant/animal gathering or processing sites.

The Colorado River Aqueduct crosses Little Morongo Canyon through an underground siphon approximately 1 mile south of the project area. The aqueduct was constructed during the 1930's and consists of several miles of tunnel through the Little San Bernardino Mountains, with siphons located where the aqueduct crosses canyons and washes. Water wells were also placed in Little Morongo Canyon to provide water for the construction project. No evidence of construction debris or work camp sites was noted within the current project area. No features or artifacts associated with or dating to the period of Aqueduct construction were identified.

A Class III intensive, pedestrian inventory, using transect spacing of less than 10 meters, was conducted for the proposed restoration locations within Little Morongo Canyon. The results of this inventory are reported in "A Class III, Intensive, Cultural Resources Inventory for the Little Morongo Canyon-2005" prepared by PSSC Archaeological Technician, Aaron S. Kind, and on file in the PSSC Field Office.

A Class III cultural resources inventory was conducted along the Little Morongo Road corridor by Chambers Group in 2002. The results of this inventory are reported in "Cultural Resources Inventory for the Coachella Valley Management Plan, Riverside County, California." The inventory examined an area of 300 feet from centerline of the existing road.

No historic properties were identified within the project area. The project will have no effect to historic properties.

If previously unidentified cultural resources are encountered during project activities, all work will cease in the immediate area and the PSSC Cultural Resources Specialist will be notified. The restoration team shall consult with the Cultural Resources Specialist before removal of litter or other manufactured materials or structures that appear to be 50 or more years in age.

Recreation

The Kickapoo Trail is a graded road passable by four-wheel drive vehicles, all-terrain vehicles, and motorcycles, although it is subject to wash-outs. It is utilized for hunting, recreational driving, accessing shooting areas, and possibly accessing hiking areas. It also provides a route of travel between Yucca Valley and Desert Hot Springs for both street-legal and non-street-legal vehicles.

Visual Resource Management
In accordance with the California Desert Conservation Area Plan Amendment for the Coachella Valley (2002), public lands affected by the proposed action are designated Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class 2. The objective of this class is to retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape resulting from management activities should be low. Management activities may be seen, but should not attract the attention of the casual observer. Any changes must repeat the basic elements of form, line, color, and texture found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape.

2. Land Status

1. **Land Use Classification:** Area of Critical Environmental Concern, MUC "L" (Limited Use).

2. **Valid Existing Rights:** There are no valid existing rights affected. One right-of-way exists in the project area and will remain open and unobstructed.
Southern California Edison, electric transmission line, ROW LA 0153396

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Critical Elements

The following table summarizes potential impacts to various elements of the human environment, including the "critical elements" listed in BLM Manual H-1790-1, Appendix 5, as amended. Elements for which there are no impacts will not be discussed further in this document.

Environmental Element	Proposed Action	No Action Alternative
Air Quality	Short-term	No Impact
ACEC's	Improve ACEC	Scars remain
Cultural Resources	No effect	No effect
Native American Concerns	No effect	No effect
Farmlands	No impact	No impact
Floodplains	No impact	No impact
Energy (E.O. 13212)	No impact	No impact
Minerals	No impact	No impact
T&E Animal Species	No Impact	No impact
T&E Plant Species	No impact	No impact

Critical Elements (continued)

Environmental Element	Proposed Action	No Action Alternative
Invasive, Nonnative Species	Beneficial impact	No impact
Wastes (hazardous/solid)	No impact	No impact
Water Quality (surface and ground)	No impact	No impact
Wetlands/Riparian Zones	No impact	No impact
Wild and Scenic Rivers	No impact	No impact
Wilderness	No impact	No impact
Environmental Justice	No impact	No impact
Health and Safety Risks to Children	No impact	No impact
Visual Resource Mgt.	Conforms to VRM Class 2 management objectives	Does not conform to VRM Class 2 management objectives

B. Discussion of Impacts and Proposed Mitigation Measures

AIR QUALITY

A. Discussion of Impacts

1. Proposed Action: An increase in fugitive dust during wind storms could occur due to the soil disturbance as a result of the proposed action. Vehicle use on the access road will generate PM-10 emissions throughout the project. Emissions from the proposed action will be minimal. No significant offsite impacts are anticipated. Control measures are not included and are not necessary to reduce emissions from the proposed project. The proposed project does not exceed the deminimus emission levels and no further conformity determination is necessary.

2. No Action Alternative: Impacts would continue to occur at current levels. Disturbed, exposed surfaces such as roads and trails experience increased wind erosion/fugitive dust.

B. Mitigation Measures

1. Use water as necessary to limit fugitive dust blowing off the site during the work if fugitive emissions exceed state and/or Riverside Co. APCD standards.

2. Curtail activities when wind speeds exceed 25 MPH.

C. Residual Impacts

No long term residual adverse effects on air resources are expected from the proposed action. The impacts are expected to occur during the duration of the proposed action. Once the action is completed the site should return to pre disturbance stability.

WILDLIFE

A. Discussion of Impacts

1. Proposed action:

Restoration of non-designated trails to natural conditions would occur on sites with pre-existing disturbances from OHV traffic. Restoration activities would create new but temporary, small-scale disturbances to set natural soil recovery and re-vegetation processes in accelerated motion for site rehabilitation and improved wildlife habitat.

Restoring soil contours and vegetation would create wildlife habitat, including habitat for desert tortoise and desert bighorn sheep. Restoration work may occur during active periods in the seasonal cycles of desert tortoise and desert bighorn sheep. It is not likely that burrows would be found in the trail or route beds. The one tortoise burrow found during pre-restoration surveys was one meter from the edge of an incursion. Restoration will reduce traffic by this burrow. Desert tortoise may burrow into berms and water ditches along the sides of undesignated trails and routes that receive very little use. Changing these features during restoration could impact the burrows of tortoises and might injure individuals.

Threatened and Endangered Species: Desert Tortoise

A small probability exists that the proposed actions could result in take of a desert tortoise during restoration activities. That take may be on the BLM-designated routes or on non-designated OHV trails during restoration activities, where heavy equipment is used. Potentially suitable burrow habitat for the federally and state threatened desert tortoise can be found in the washes and lower areas within the two canyons, but the hill climbs and trails that will be rehabilitated are currently too compacted for burrowing.

Other Wildlife

No other wildlife species would be negatively affected, and no additional impacts to wildlife resources are anticipated.

2. No Action Alternative: Some negative impacts to wildlife resources would continue to occur because of continuing vegetation loss and soil erosion occurring on non-designated OHV trails. This results in a reduction in available food resources and impaired water quality, which could cause population decreases for all species, including Threatened and Endangered Species. Also, desert tortoises would continue to be threatened by vehicular travel on the non-designated and designated 'closed' routes.

B. Mitigation Measures

All personnel and equipment will be brought in through the SCE access road which is scheduled to remain intact. All work, including hand preparations, transplanting, equipment operation for ripping roads and trails, the moving of dead debris and boulders and maintenance and monitoring activities will be conducted only on the currently impacted areas of unauthorized hill climbs, roads and trails. These areas are presently devoid of vegetation and suffer from moderate to severe compaction. In addition to the environmental protection measures incorporated in the section on the spectrum of Proposed Actions, BLM resource specialists have adapted guidelines from the US Fish and Wildlife Service for mitigating desert tortoise impact (see Appendix 1). For the site where a tortoise and burrow were found during pre-restoration surveys, a biological monitor will be present during restoration.

C. Residual Impacts

No long term residual adverse effects on wildlife are expected from the proposed action.

SOILS

A. Discussion of Impacts

1. Proposed Action: Restoration of non-designated trails and routes would impact soils by modifying texture, particle size distribution, chemical properties, and biological content in affected soils. Pitting of some soils (i.e. desert pavement) may create areas with a different color, drawing attention to the restored area. Positive impacts from a restoration can include a reduction of wind and water erosion in the long-term. Smoothing and scarifying soil can expose soil to wind erosion. In addition, some temporary soil loss from wind blown erosion is likely. However, in the long-term, soil loss would decline because of increased vegetation.

The application of Permeon will have no impact on soils. Permeon is a chemically neutral substance and will not harm humans or wildlife. More information on Permeon can be accessed on the web at: http://www.permeon.com/question.shtr.

2. No Action Alternative: Under the No Action Alternative, some impacts to soils would continue to occur. This includes compaction by vehicular traffic, and wind and water erosion.

B. Mitigation Measures

Sites with the desert pavement soil type, or those with marked changes in soil color in the top 10 cm of soil, will not be pitted or decompacted. In addition to the other environmental protection measures incorporated in the Proposed Action, BLM resource specialists may select from the list of additional mitigation measures outlined in BLM manuals/handbooks and other documents.

C. Residual Impacts

There would be few residual impacts to soils after mitigation from rehabilitation activities. Generally, these activities will increase infiltration and percolation rates in affected soils, increase available water, breakup soil compaction and loss of organic matter.

VEGETATION

A. Discussion of Impacts

1. Proposed action:

Most of the non-designated trails to be restored are already partially or entirely devoid of vegetation. Restoration under this EA would improve the vegetative cover and create more wildlife habitat with native vegetation. Populations of early-stage shrubs would be the first species to increase while in the long-term late-stage shrubs such as creosote would establish themselves in restored shrublands.

Restoration sites have been surveyed for special status plants, and no such species were found. The crew would reexamine the sites for newly emerged special status plants before they begin work, and cease work and call a BLM Natural Resource Specialist if they suspect any special status plants are present. If the special status plants are not correctly identified, they may be impacted by soil disturbance.

Some non-native plant species may be eradicated locally.

Indirect impacts would be in the form of dust settling on the nearby vegetation stands, which may reduce photosynthetic capabilities.

2. No Action Alternative: Some impacts to vegetation resources would continue, such as trampling of vegetation by continued OHV travel on routes and trails that have not been approved for such use.

B. Mitigation Measures

No soil disturbance would occur within a meter of special-status plants. Restoration sites with known populations of an annual plant species of concern would not be restored while the annual plant species are growing, flowering, or spreading seed. In addition to environmental protection measures incorporated in the Proposed Action, BLM resource specialists may select from the list of additional mitigation measures outlined in BLM manuals/handbooks and other documents. Weed treatments with herbicides will require special approval and coordination with the Palm Springs FO Weed Specialist.

C. Residual Impacts

No long term residual adverse effects on vegetation are expected from the proposed action

RECREATION

A. Discussion of Impacts

1. Proposed Action: Recreational activities on the Kickapoo Trail may rely on the use of vehicles, whether as an element of the primary activity itself (e.g., vehicle touring for sightseeing purposes), or to access such recreation resources as hiking trails. The requirements for vehicular access, be they recreational, administrative, or for other purposes, were considered during the route designation process for the CDCA Plan Amendment for the Coachella Valley (CV Plan). The approved network of vehicle routes is deemed satisfactory in meeting access needs for recreation while protecting various other resource values, particularly those related to wildlife, wildlife habitats, and cultural resources. The proposed restoration of vehicle routes, trails, and tracks that were not approved for vehicle use through the CV Plan, therefore, would result in no adverse impacts to recreation; use of these vehicle ways is not necessary for the enjoyment of recreational resources in Big Morongo Canyon Preserve.

2. No Action Alternative: Motorized-vehicle activities on routes, trails, and tracks not approved for such use does not conform to BLM's land use plan. The proposed action is one element of a strategy to implement route designation decisions made through the CV Plan. Absent this or other actions to encourage the use of approved routes, recreationists could be issued citations for traveling where it is inappropriate and illegal to do so, thereby adversely affecting their recreational experience. Further, degradation of resource values (such as soil erosion, crushing of vegetation, and wildlife mortality) from vehicular use of closed or non-approved routes, trails, and tracks would adversely affect opportunities for such recreational endeavors as sightseeing, nature study, and photography.

B. Mitigation Measures

A program to inform the public about the restoration of closed and non-approved vehicle routes, trails, and tracks should be established. The intent of the program would be to encourage the use of approved routes for motorized-vehicle activities, and describe the adverse impacts associated with the use of non-approved vehicle ways.

C. Residual Impacts

No residual adverse impacts to recreation are anticipated.

VISUAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

A. Discussion of Impacts

1. Proposed Action: Restoration of vehicle routes, trails, and tracks not approved for vehicle use generally reduces contrast in the long-term between "management activities" (in this case, evidence of activities that are inconsistent with management prescriptions established by the CV Plan) and the characteristic landscape. As soils are stabilized and native vegetation becomes reestablished, evidence of non-conforming uses diminishes. The proposed action would, in time,

result in the assimilation of the basic elements of form, line, color, and texture of the characteristic landscape where vehicular activities have created substantial contrasts. Evidence of such vehicular activities would no longer attract the attention of the casual observer when viewed from the key observation point (this being the Kickapoo Trail itself), thereby achieving VRM Class 2 management objectives. In the short-term, contrasts resulting from the proposed action may be evident, but substantially less noticeable than the vehicle routes, trails, and tracks should no restoration occur. Hence, short-term effects would also achieve VRM Class 2 management objectives.

2. **No Action Alternative:** When viewed from the key observation point (Kickapoo Trail), the numerous vehicle routes, trails, and tracks identified for restoration would attract the attention of the casual observer. The form, line, color, and texture of these routes, trails, and tracks are substantially different from those of the characteristic landscape. Contrasts between these vehicular routes, trails, and tracks, and the landscape would not conform to VRM Class 2 management objectives.

B. Mitigation Measures

The proposed action itself is designed to mitigate the impacts of vehicular activities that are not approved by the CV Plan. No additional mitigation measures are necessary.

C. Residual Impacts

No residual impacts to visual resources are anticipated.

Cumulative Impacts

1. **Proposed Action:** The resource impacts of the restoration efforts would have no long term cumulative impacts to soils, vegetation, wildlife habitat, cultural, or visual resources. Restoration of illegal OHV routes would have a long term positive impact to the soils, vegetation, and wildlife habitat of the Big Morongo Canyon ACEC. By removing existing illegal routes, future use of these routes, and continued resource degradation would be reduced.

2. **No Action:** Taking no action, and not completing restoration of illegal routes, would result in continued use of routes by OHV's. Route proliferation and impacts to soils, vegetation, wildlife habitat, cultural, and visual resources would increase, leading to continued cumulative impacts to these resources over time.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT CONSIDERATIONS:

Public comments submitted for this environmental assessment, including names and street addresses of respondents, will be available for public review at the Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office during regular business hours (7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.), Monday through Friday, except holidays. Individual respondents may request confidentiality. If you wish to withhold your name or address from public review or from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your comments. Such requests will be honored to the extent allowed by law. All submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, will be made available for public inspection in their entirety.

PREPARED BY:

Starry Sprenkle, ECO Restoration Ecologist
Aaron S. Kind, BLM Archaeological Technician
Donna Thomas, Biological Technician

REVIEWED BY: _____ _____
Environmental Coordinator Date

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
PALM SPRINGS-SOUTH COAST FIELD OFFICE

DECISION RECORD
CA-660-05-28

NAME of PROJECT: OHV Route Restoration, Northern Kickapoo Trail

DECISION: It is my decision to approve the proposed action as described in Environmental Assessment (EA) number CA-660-05-28. Compliance with the mitigation measures identified in the EA is hereby required. These measures are incorporated into this decision record as stipulations by reference. A copy of this Decision Record and attendant conditions of approval (stipulations) shall be in the possession of the on-site operator during all undertakings approved herein.

RATIONALE: To restore native habitat to pre-disturbance condition. To discourage the future use by OHV traffic over unauthorized trails. The approved action is in conformance with applicable land use plans and will not cause unnecessary or undue degradation.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT: Environmental impacts associated with the proposed action have been assessed. Based on the analysis provided in the attached EA, I conclude the approved action is not a major federal action and will result in no significant impacts to the environment under the criteria in Title 40 Code of Federal Regulations 1508.18 and 1508.27. Preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement to further analyze possible impacts is not required pursuant to Section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969.

APPEALS: This decision may be appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of the Secretary, in accordance with the regulations at Title 43 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 4, and the information provided in Form 1842-1 (enclosed). If an appeal is taken, your notice of appeal must be filed in the Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Department of the Interior, 690 West Garnet Avenue, P.O. Box 581260, North Palm Springs, California 92258, within 30 days from receipt of this decision. The appellant has the burden of showing that the decision appealed from is in error.

If you wish to file a petition for a stay of the effectiveness of this decision during the time that your appeal is being reviewed by the Board, pursuant to Title 43 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Part 4, Subpart E, the petition for a stay must accompany your notice of appeal. A petition for a stay is required to show sufficient justification based on the standards listed below. Copies of the notice of appeal and petition for a stay must also be submitted to each party named in this decision and to the Interior Board of Land Appeals and to the appropriate Office of the Solicitor (see 43 CFR 4.413) at the same time the original documents are filed with this office. If you request a stay, you have the burden of proof to demonstrate that a stay should be granted.

Standards for Obtaining a Stay

Except as otherwise provided by law or other pertinent regulations, a petition for a stay of a decision pending appeal shall show sufficient justification based on the following standards:

(1) the relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied,
(2) the likelihood of the appellant's success on the merits,
(3) the likelihood of immediate and irreparable harm if the stay is not granted, and
(4) whether the public interest favors granting the stay.

APPROVED BY: _____ _____

Field Manager Date
Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office
USDI Bureau of Land Management
690 W. Garnet Avenue; P.O. Box 581260
North Palm Springs, CA 92258-1260

Appendix 1: *Desert Tortoise Mitigation*

The following tortoise mitigation measures will apply .

1. Desert tortoise sign and presence pre-restoration surveys will be conducted at all sites. If during these surveys a tortoise or burrow is observed within the route to be restored or the 15 m buffer on each side of the centerline, a qualified biologist monitor must be present during restoration activities at that site and work will only take place during the desert tortoise inactive season, November 1 – March 1. The biologist will thoroughly survey the project site for presence of tortoises each day before and during construction activities. This biologist shall have authority to halt any action that might result in harm to a tortoise. No soil disturbance shall occur within 1 meter of a desert tortoise burrow.

2. An employee education program must be presented to all on-site workers prior to beginning work. The program may consist of a class or video presented by a qualified biologist (BLM or contracted) or a video. Wallet-sized cards with important information for workers to carry are recommended. All on-site workers shall participate in a tortoise education program prior to initiation of restoration activities. The operator is responsible for ensuring that the education program is developed and presented prior to conducting activities. The program shall cover the following topics at a minimum:

   - Distribution of the desert tortoise,
   - General behavior and ecology of the tortoise,
   - Sensitivity to human activities,
   - Legal protection,
   - Penalties for violations of State or Federal laws,
   - reporting requirements, and
   - Project protective mitigation measures.

3. During restoration, if a tortoise is observed within 15 m of the centerline of the route to be restored (area of impact), all activities potentially affecting the individual tortoise will cease and will not continue until the individual has moved out of the area of impact. If a previously undetected tortoise burrow is discovered in the area of impact, work will not continue until a biological monitor is on-site.

4. Desert tortoises will not be handled in order to move them out of the project area. The only case in which they would be handled would be in order to take them to a qualified veterinarian (see Item 7).

5. The area of disturbance shall be confined to the smallest practical area, considering topography, placement of facilities, location of burrows, pubic health and safety, and other limiting factors. Work area boundaries shall be delimited with flagging or other marking to minimize surface disturbance associated with vehicle straying. Special habitat features, such as burrows, identified by the qualified biologist shall be protected by at least a two meter buffer with no soil disturbance.

6. Upon locating a dead or injured tortoise, the operator (restoration crew) is to notify the BLM. The BLM must then notify the appropriate field office (Carlsbad) of USFWS by telephone within three days of the finding. Written notification must be made within fifteen days of the finding. The information provided must include the date and time of the finding or incident (if known), location of the carcass, a photograph, cause of death, if known, and other pertinent information. Tortoise remains shall be collected, delivered to the BLM, and frozen as soon as possible. Injured animals shall be transported to a qualified veterinarian for treatment at the expense of the project proponent. If an injured animal recovers, the USFWS should be contacted for final disposition of the animal.

7. All trash and food items shall be promptly contained within closed, raven-proof containers. These shall be regularly removed from the project site to reduce the attractiveness of the area to ravens and other tortoise predators.